

# DARKEST RUSSIA

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## CHAPTER VII.

### Ilda Barosky.

There appeared for a moment a young girl, bearing a violin and bow—it was only for a moment—between the two servants, Azof and Hanajka.

With a quick gesture she threw aside the servants, and with flashing eyes and head erect she advanced to the center of the room.

"Who is responsible for this outrage—this insult? Who is master here?" she demanded, in quick, impassioned tones, while her face indicated the terrible excitement which possessed her.

Paul Nazimoff advanced quickly. "Stop, girl! You forget yourself and who you are. You were commanded here by me—Paul, Count Nazimoff—"

"Who and what is Paul, Count Nazimoff, that he should command me?" was the imperious answer. "Am I your servant, your serf, your child, or your debtor? I am a free-born Russian, no slave, and I shall not obey you!"

Count Nazimoff, by his command had thrown down the gage of battle, and Ilda Barosky—for it was the exile's daughter—had taken it up. Two strong natures were in conflict. On the one hand stood Paul Nazimoff, rich, powerful, noble, accustomed all his life to command and to be obeyed, and now humiliated, if beaten, in the presence of all his guests.

On the other, the young girl, proud, haughty and unbending, her woman's pride stung to the quick by being thrust like a serf into the midst of the brilliant throng, and commanded to play, as a master commands a slave. It was not hard to see that hers was a nature that never would yield to force, not even if resistance meant the loss of life itself.

How was the battle to end?

"I shall not obey you!"

The words that ended the young girl's speech kept ringing in the ears of Paul Nazimoff. "I shall not obey you!"

No such words had ever been addressed to him before. Could he believe the evidence of his own senses?



Surely everybody in St. Petersburg knew that he, of all the great nobles in the capital, was the one whose autocratic ways were best known. All his guests knew it—and yet here, an unknown girl, an humble musician, dared to stand before him, under his own roof, and to fling in his face the bold defiance, "I shall not obey you!"

Paul Nazimoff's face, flushed before, now turned to a ghastly white, and his eyes seemed to turn to coals of fire. He no longer shouted. He appeared calm, but it was the calmness of the tiger about to spring on his unsuspecting victim.

"And I swear"—the words came slowly, with a hissing sound, from between the lips—"and I swear you

shall obey me. You forget who I am. I am Paul, Count Nazimoff."

"And I swear I shall not obey you. I am Ilda Barosky, the daughter of an exile, and I shall not play 'God Save the Czar!'"

No one spoke.

The strain was fearfully intense.

Paul Nazimoff shook for a moment as the tree shakes when it feels the first blast of the hurricane! The storm was now beyond control. He forgot himself, his guests, his position, manhood, nobility—all—everything. With an oath he snatched the whip from the hands of Hanajka and raising it advanced a step toward the girl.

"Father!"

"Count Nazimoff!"

The two expressions rang out as one—the first by Alexis, the other by Cobb.

Alexis was first—he seized the uplifted hand. "Father, you must not!"

"Must not! must not!" shouted Nazimoff. He fairly thundered now. Rage had dethroned Reason. "Stand back!" he shouted. "Stand back, for I swear this girl shall play or she shall suffer. Let no one come between us." His voice grew louder. "She has insulted me, my guests, the czar—I swear she shall suffer. No power on earth can save her. Hanajka, Azof—seize her! Seize her!"

The servants obeyed. They would have strangled her there and then had they been so commanded.

"Now, girl, for the last time," he raised the whip, "play, or I swear to degrade you by the lash. There is nothing can save you. Now what think you of defying Paul, Count Nazimoff?"

The lash was uplifted.

It was a face distorted by insane rage and fury that, with eyes aflame with devilish resolve, looked into the face of Ilda Barosky.

She never moved. There was no sign of fear, whatever she may have felt. She looked defiance.

"Take hold of her arms and compel the bow to cross the strings!" fairly screamed Nazimoff, as he again raised the whip.

The servants obeyed.

Paul Nazimoff held the whip uplifted. "It is the last time," he yelled. "What will save you now?"

"This will!" The answer of Ilda Barosky, shrill and clear as a trumpet sound, rang out, as with a quick motion she raised the violin far above her head, and, before any one could prevent, dashed the instrument into a thousand pieces at the feet of Nazimoff!

He was baffled—beaten.

There was a gasp as he made a motion with the whip. Cobb and Alexis sprang forward to avert the blow, but it was needless. The whip fell from his hands and he fell forward. The strain had been too much, and the next moment he was unconscious.

With a quick motion Alexis sprang to the side of the girl. "Quick, come with me," he said in a low voice, as he grasped her by the arm. In all the confusion Cobb seemed to keep his mind. "Get her away," he urged Alexis, and at the same moment he supported the stricken count to a low couch where several physicians among the guests attended him. A moment consultation and they decided that it was nothing serious. Paul Nazimoff was suffering from the effects of a shock and overtaxed nerves. It was all right. A few hours rest and he would be quite himself again.

With a word of apology to the guests for the unhappy affair that had brought the festivities to such an unpleasant termination, Alexis bid good night to such as remained. Cobb he asked not to leave him.

Alexis Nazimoff, immediately after the departure of the last of the guests, retired to his own room, accompanied by General Cobb. He was laboring under intense emotion, and it was some minutes before he became suffi-

ciently composed to trust himself to speak. When he became somewhat calmer he turned to the American, and putting out his hand as if to ask for friendship and sympathy, said, in a voice that still indicated the intensity of his feelings: "Cobb, my fate was decided to-night!"

Cobb was about to answer, when, with a movement, Alexis stopped him, and in an impassioned strain broke out: "You do not know—you do not know that she who stood before my father to-night—she whom he would have degraded by the lash—is the woman I love—the only woman who will ever be my wife."

To say that Cobb was astounded mildly expresses it.

He sat amazed and expectant, not knowing what to say. Alexis went on: "Three years ago I first met her, when she was a pupil at the Conservatory. She had appeared before a brilliant assemblage, and won the admiration of all by her wondrous beauty



and her genius. I sought and obtained an introduction to her through the Baroness von Rhineberg. I loved her madly, passionately, devotedly—I loved her then as I love her now. I offered her my name, I asked her to become my wife."

Cobb started. He had anticipated a different avowal, and in his mind had framed a reply to Alexis. But he was not prepared for his.

"Ilda refused," continued Alexis, "unless I could gain my father's consent. My marriage with her, she urged, would be a blow to my fondest hopes of military distinction; would ostracise me in St. Petersburg, and would alienate the affections of my father. All this was true, but I cared nothing for it. I begged, implored her to listen to me—to give her consent. I offered to resign my commission in the army, to leave Russia with her, to make, in short, any sacrifice—but all in vain. My father heard of my love for her and we had a stormy scene, which ended in my leaving the house. I went directly to see Ilda—she was gone! In vain I sought her everywhere; she had disappeared as if she were no longer on earth. A week later I received peremptory orders to proceed to the frontier and join the Don Cossacks for a campaign in Turkestan, and a short time after my arrival in Asia I received a note from my father that a marriage had been arranged between Olga Karsicheff and myself, the ceremony to take place on my return to St. Petersburg. Broken-hearted at the loss of Ilda, I made no objection, and you know the rest. I never saw Ilda Barosky from the time I left St. Petersburg until to-night. Now all my love has returned with tenfold strength, and I swear that no other woman shall ever be my wife!"

"But your father, after to-night—"

"He does not know that I was Ilda—he never saw her. Carried away by his rage at her refusal, he knew not who it was that dared to thwart a will that all through life had never been gainsaid. To-night," and Alexis arose, "to-night has decided my fate. I am going to find Ilda Barosky—I am going to make

her my wife! I am going to ask you—"

A knock at the door interrupted him.

"Come in!"

A servant entered, and bowing respectfully said a word or two, and in answer to Alexis' quick response withdrew to reappear a moment later with a soldier wearing the uniform of the same regiment as that to which Alexis belonged.

Then followed a few words of dialogue in a language Cobb could not understand, and the soldier withdrew.

When they were once more alone Alexis turned to Cobb. "I am going to trust you fully and freely," he said. "My servant has just returned, having followed Ilda to her destination. I know where she is and I am going there to-night. If my father should awake, I ask you, in the name of our friendship, to make such explanation of my absence as will cause him no uneasiness until my return. You will do this for me, will you not?" said the young soldier, holding out his hand.

Cobb could say no more. He grasped the proffered hand of Alexis and five minutes later was alone.

Alexis was on his way to seek Ilda Barosky.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### The Nihilist Rendezvous.

A long, low room, with heavy wooden rafters supporting the ceiling, which was grimed and blacked by the smoke of a dozen oil lamps.

A room with a hot, stifling, suffocating atmosphere—the result of the smoking lamps, the fumes of tobacco and an almost red-hot stove, which had raised the temperature to an uncomfortable, almost an unsupportable degree.

A long table, upon which was scattered a miscellaneous collection of implements, a couple of rude benches, a chair or two, and some rough boxes, utilized as seats, constituted most of the furnishings.

The half-dozen steps, leading up to a heavily barred door, indicated that the room was a cellar, and the two small windows, both with heavy shutters of solid wood, which were only a few inches higher than the bottom of the door, were of apparently little practical use, either for light or ventilation.

Within this underground apartment, for such it really was, were gathered, on the same evening as that on which the events described in the last chapter occurred, some twelve or fifteen men and three women. Their faces, darkened even beyond their natural color by the smoke and grime, were marked by suppressed excitement, while their conversation, animated in the extreme, was carried on in that suppressed way suggestive of extreme caution and ceaseless apprehension.

Not that all were talking.

There were workers there, men who toiled and delved and whose grimy hands, hard and knotted, gave evidence that theirs had been no child's play. A long coil of wire, some electrical instruments, and some curiously suggestive metal globes, were some of the objects on the table of which mention has already been made.

The conversation, after an interval of silence, had begun again.

(To be continued.)

### Sure Sign of Death.

The doctors who soothe the demon of drink in the alcoholic ward of a New York hospital have recently discovered an unfailing indication of the approaching death of patients. One of them described it in this way:

"The great majority of alcoholic patients in this city are truck drivers. Naturally, when they are driving a team and are continually urging their steeds ahead. It's all right as long as they keep driving ahead, but the moment we hear them begin to back their horses we know it's all off, and we might as well order their shrouds. In dozens of cases I never knew this sign to fail."